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ABSTRACT

Four groups of midwestern teachers (N=103) enrolled in graduate courses in elementary curriculum and comparative education were asked to register their degree of support for a list of goals of global education. Most teachers registered support for the goals but had little to offer in the way of implementation of the goals in their own classrooms. A process was initiated with these inservice teachers to: get teachers to value global education and incorporate it into classroom time when possible; and give teachers confidence in their ability to teach with a global approach, to select materials for understanding other cultures, and to identify opportunities to infuse a global perspective into the entire elementary curriculum. Steps in the process included: (1) finding out what the teachers were already doing; (2) identifying key features of their own culture(s); (3) imposing a structure on culture through categorization by economics, educational systems, family, religion, geography, cultural diversity, ethnic groups, political systems, and recreation; (4) extending conclusions to other cultures; (5) identifying global issues; and (6) identifying opportunities for interdisciplinary study. (LL)

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Implementing Global Education in the Elementary School: Getting Teachers Beyond Lists of Goals

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Running Head: Beyond Lists of Goals

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Global education has been a prominent theme in curriculum literature for years, but its visibility in many classrooms is dim, if perceptible at all. This is not to imply that teachers are insensitive to the need for global understanding. On the contrary, when four groups of Midwestern teachers enrolled in graduate courses in elementary curriculum and comparative education were given a list of goals of global education (Williams, 1988) and asked to register their degree of support for each, they indicated a high level of agreement. When asked to list activities they use in their classrooms to achieve these goals, however, most were able to offer only a few concrete examples. The problem appeared to be not so much one of getting these elementary teachers to endorse the need for global education as it was their lack of academic preparation for the task, their feelings of being pressured by competing demands on classroom time, and the minimal opportunities they had had to experience other cultures first hand.

Teachers are exposed to a great deal of literature regarding the need for global understanding, but they may read these rationale and lists of goals and still feel mystified about what they are to do: How do I move my students beyond ethnocentrism? How do I help them understand and appreciate other cultures? How do I teach them to handle international situations objectively? Which international situations? The confusion is understandable since few courses in undergraduate education programs have a cross-cultural or international focus. In fact, in an Educational Testing Service study of 3000 undergraduates, it was the education majors who scored lower than any other group except vocational/agricultural majors in knowledge about global issues (Torney-Purta, 1982). Teachers who lack basic knowledge in a particular area tend

to rely heavily on textbooks (Cortes and Fleming, 1986). The NCSS Task Force on Early Childhood/Elementary Social Studies (1989) reports that many elementary teachers have far less confidence in their ability to teach social studies content than reading or math, and since culture receives scant, inconsistent treatment in textbooks, it is unlikely that many elementary teachers will be able to fill in the gaps. The Task Force describes the consequences for the nation's schools: "The prevailing inattention to international topics and in-depth cultural comparisons leaves little mystery as to why more than 50 percent of the students in Goodlad's study perceived other countries and their ideologies as threatening to the United States" (p.20). Further, teachers do not see how many of the other subject areas they teach could be studied from an international perspective or how information gleaned from those subject areas is connected to the search for solutions to global problems. Since none of the teachers in this project reported actually having experienced interdisciplinary teaching themselves, the absence of such models may have accounted in large measure for their vague notions of how one would organize such opportunities.

Lack of cross-cultural experience also inhibited the teacher's understanding of the goals of global education. Most of the teachers were from small rural and suburban communities where they had few encounters with other cultures. Such traveling as they had done offered only surface glimpses of other lifestyles and few opportunities to know a person from another culture well. They thus lacked a key ingredient for authoring an outward-looking approach to social studies and other curriculum areas and for judging their own efforts in that direction. Their own homogeneous backgrounds interfered with their ability to see

themselves within the context of an ethnically diverse nation and world. Sometimes they thought they were incorporating the larger world into their classrooms, but they had not developed structures for making decisions about which information would best translate into cross-cultural competence and how best to impart it. When asked to describe global education in their classrooms, nearly all described preparing food from a particular culture, learning to sing a folk song, playing a game or learning about dress (Japan was the country most often mentioned in these contexts). Some thought teaching about cultures was covered by developing units on Indians or holidays in other countries. A few mentioned using childrens' literature or films. These sketchy efforts reflect a lack of understanding of what constitutes culture. True, one is a member of a culture and might reasonably expect this experience to serve as a bridge to examining other cultures whether one has traveled extensively or not, but the assumption breaks down. Membership in a culture is no guarantee of understanding its structure because this is learned affectively, by being lived rather than merely heard about. Furthermore, the rules are not in full view. They are learned more by absorbing countless subtle cues than by receiving overt messages. Our first trouble, then, in teaching about culture is that we do not even know ourselves in a cultural sense (Cushner and Trifanovitch, 1989). Think about the difficulty in trying to describe "Americanness" to a foreigner! This need for a better point of departure prompted the authors to try an inductive approach to having the teachers describe their own culture and then use the categories of information thus identified as a guide for collecting information about other cultures.

Even assuming they had studied and experienced more about culture and global issues, the teachers described themselves as being already overwhelmed by the competing demands of basic skills, criterion referenced tests, traditional content, and social concerns such as drug education. They were not anxious to add to the problem by trying to incorporate more global education into their daily schedules and, since they did not understand how an interdisciplinary approach could be used to infuse a global perspective into subjects they were already teaching, they did not see any alternative to simply piling on more coursework. The authors' goals then became:

(1) getting teachers to value global education sufficiently that they would look for ways to choose in its favor when allocating scarce classroom time, and

(2) giving them confidence in their ability to teach it by equipping them with a solid understanding of (a) how to sift available material to select what is useful for understanding other cultures and (b) identify opportunities to infuse a global perspective into the entire elementary curriculum.

It is easier to effect the desired changes if students are enrolled in a global education course, but often the only opportunity to address the issue is within the framework of another graduate course or during a school inservice meeting. It becomes necessary, then, to seek some means of accomplishing the objectives in a relatively short amount of time. What follows is a description of a process which has been used with a total of 103 inservice teachers who were enrolled in either a graduate elementary curriculum or comparative education course. The average class size was 26 students, and the process took place over four class

meetings. In each instance, two hours of the available class time was usually devoted to this topic, making a total of approximately eight hours.

Step 1: Finding Out What Students Were Already Doing

Students were given the following list of goals for global education and asked to indicate how important they felt each was on a six point scale. They were then asked what types of things, if any, they did in their classes that involved these goals:

1. Perceive the world as an interdependent human community.
2. Recognize the benefits as well as the difficulties inherent in a world of cultural diversity.
3. Recognize common problems facing the world community.
4. Recognize that a feeling of self worth is a basic human right.
5. Recognize that the world is in a state of constant change.
6. Recognize that one's perceptions of the world are not necessarily shared by others and develop the capacity to put oneself in another's shoes.
7. Develop the ability to inquire into world issues and analyze them objectively.
8. Develop human relations skills to relate effectively with individuals from other cultures.

As indicated earlier, students indicated a high level of agreement with the goals but reported a very limited range of activities used in working toward them.

Step 2: Identification of Key Features of One's Own Culture

Students in each class were divided into groups of either primary or intermediate grade teachers. Group size was limited to four or five members. The groups were given approximately twenty minutes to develop a list of things they felt would be important for visitors to the United States to understand in order to function effectively in this culture. Typical lists included such items as: freedom of religion and speech, representative government, individualism, world power, materialism, changing family structure, diverse geography and climate, different subcultures, large population, entertainment/recreation, violence, prejudice, school curriculum, market economy, types of jobs, fast food, holidays, time-oriented, English language, rural/suburban/urban, technology, permissiveness. Lists were recorded on charts and displayed around the room.

Step 3: Combining Lists into Categories

Students are asked to look at each list and note items which could be combined into groups. A master list is thus devised which condenses all lists into one and organizes items into a hierarchy of categories and subcategories such as the following example from one class:

I. Economic structure
   - A. Change in the workplace
   - B. Market economy
   - C. Consumerism
   - D. Taxes
   - E. Technology

V. Geography
   - A. Physical features
   - B. Climate
   - C. Population
     1. Concentrations
     2. Immigration
     3. Rural/urban/suburban
   - D. Transportation

II. Educational system
   A. Curriculum
   B. Problems
   C. Local control
   D. Testing
III. Family structure
   A. Nuclear family
   B. Single parent families
   C. Roles
   D. Individualism
IV. Religion
   A. Customs
   B. Differences
VI. Cultural diversity & ethnic groups
   A. Languages
   B. Customs & history
   C. Conflicts
   D. Values
VII. Political system
   A. Government structure
   B. Political parties
   C. Social services
VIII. Recreation
   A. Sports oriented
   B. Entertainment industry
   C. Computer games

While a list such as the one above would by no means equip one to launch an anthropological study, its virtue lies in the fact that the teachers themselves have devised the list and so understand it. In most cases, it marks their first attempt to impose any sort of structure on what they know about their own culture and can, as such, serve as their first bridge for using what they know about themselves to begin learning about others.

Step 4: Extending Conclusions to Other Cultures

At the next class meeting, the students were again divided into groups and asked to generate lists of things they would want to know about a country if they were to go to go abroad to live for at least six months. This task was not assigned during the previous class meeting because the authors felt the responses would be overly influenced by their earlier work unless some time had elapsed between consideration of the two topics. After developing group lists, the class repeated the previous

process of combining them into a master list. This list was then compared with the outline students had generated for informing others about American culture. Both lists were then evaluated to see how complete a picture they would give to anyone wishing to understand other cultures. Finally, a list of possible sources was compiled for gathering the type of information called for in the outline (e.g., travel guides, world almanac, news sources, international students organizations at colleges and universities, atlases, history books, ads in popular magazines such as Paris Match, lists of addresses for consulates and embassies, etc.).

Step 5: Identifying Global Issues

In the third class period, students were asked to write down what they would consider to be the three most important issues facing us today. They were next asked to prioritize the items on their list and write down the reason they felt their choice for number one was the single, most overriding source of concern. This step was added to give the groups an opportunity to reflect on the urgency of the issues. Students then shared their choices and supporting reasons, and a master list was recorded. The class examined the list of issues to see which items affected countries besides the United States. Those entries were then labeled "Global Issues," and students were asked to identify issues on the list which might productively be examined at the elementary school level. It was usually decided that almost all of the issues could be addressed in some form in the elementary curriculum.

Step 6: Identifying Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Study

The instructor next selected one topic such as homelessness from the list of global issues and asked the class to generate a list of questions about it:

What causes homelessness?

What types of people end up homeless?

Is it really a mental health problem?

What other countries have this problem?

Is it a recent problem, or is it just now getting a lot of media attention?

What are different countries doing about it?

How much money does it cost to get somebody off the street and into a home?

Where do they go if they get sick or if they~re hungry or cold?

What can governments do about it? On the national level? State? Local?

How much housing space would be needed to solve the problem in our community? In others?

The class then decided which subjects areas might yield information to answer their questions. In the above case, the class identified social studies (history, geography. political science, economics, sociology), math, reading and science as contributing necessary information. Students also decided they could incorporate the other language arts of writing, speaking, and listening as well as art. Conclusions were summarized in the form of a curriculum wheel and suggestions offered about how to locate pertinent information. Next, each student was asked to (a) select another topic from the list of global issues, (b) prepare a list of questions, (c) identify relevant curriculum areas and (d) construct a

wheel to share with the class at the next meeting. On the fourth class period, wheels were shared in small groups, critiqued and edited. Final editions were photocopied and distributed so that each student would have a collection to use in his or her own class and to share with colleagues.

The last task was for students to look again at the original list of goals for global education that was distributed at the beginning of the first class meeting and list ways they intended to meet the goals. This time responses were much fuller, indicating far more differentiated concepts of culture and cross-cultural understanding, awareness of ways to integrate global topics into other areas of the curriculum, and knowledge of the need for more depth than having tea and rice, singing *Sakura*, and trying on a kimono. Students also expressed much more confidence in their ability to locate and select information and appeared anxious to try out their new skills and to discuss them in faculty meetings.

Students responses to the question, "What personal beliefs or ideas have been challenged by the class assignment to develop an Interdisciplinary Global Curriculum?" tend to support the premise for this study. A sample of their responses follows:

> Prior to taking this class my global thinking was very narrow. I have come to realize that if my thinking is narrow then I must be coming across this way to my students. I used to focus only on local concerns and to some degree those of the U.S. It never dawned on me to think globally even though I have lived in many places and other countries.

> I didn't realize that global awareness could be brought to the students in such challenging, interesting ways. I am one among those teachers who teach other cultures through food and holidays. It's good to know that there are far better ways, far more interesting ways, and far more relevant ways to teach students about being a part of a whole world community.

Conclusion

The findings reported here are merely intended to be suggestive. Teachers did leave the classes with better understanding of two ways to approach global education: either as in-depth, comparative studies of culture or as an interdisciplinary examination of global issues. The evidence for success of the process, however, is largely anecdotal. A strict research protocol was not employed because the project was originally conceived, not as a research design, but as a collaborative search for solutions to the dual problems of elementary teachers' relative inattention to global education and lack of time available to teacher educators to work with them on improving global education. Subsequent trials will be accompanied by more rigorous data collection. The authors will also conduct follow-up interviews at a later date to determine whether or not the teachers actually put their new skills into practice and to what extent their time commitment to global education increased.

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